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This Showdown Period
of History

By

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WE are living in a world of fear, confusion—and hope. It is a world suffering from the physical impact of two disastrous wars within a single generation; it is a world now making physical preparations to defend itself against a new and growing threat to its security and its freedom.

It is imperative that the physical bulwarks of freedom be made impregnable and that no human effort be spared toward such an end. It is vital, too, that this be done before the sands of freedom have run out.

I should like to submit, however, that the security of what we call the democratic world is not a matter of physical forces alone. For physical forces, insofar as they may be made to serve the purposes of human beings, are set in motion by the fears, the hopes and the ambitions of humanity in all its varying segments. The key to the future, then, is in the minds of men.

We in America are deeply concerned—and properly so—over what is in the minds of people everywhere. I have been in the countries of northern

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and western Europe four times since the close of World War II. On these occasions I felt a deep interest in viewing something more than enchanting fjords, fertile plains and majestic mountain peaks. Beyond such visual experiences I cherished the hope that I might look into the minds of men. Today, if I may, I should like to try to tell you what I saw. Then I should like to contemplate with you the significance of the fears and hopes and aspirations I discerned.

Germany Revisited

Suppose I begin with the Germans, for here are peoples who have played a decisive part in both the achievements and the tragic failures of Europe and the world. Despite its present prostration I am convinced that Germany will play a major role—in one direction or its opposite—in the destiny of human freedom.

I had visited Germany during the days of Hitler, and I first returned two years ago to witness the desolation and destruction caused by his mad crusade.

I entered Germany in 1950 by way of Hamburg. That city, as most of you know, is still the second largest seaport of Europe, ranking next to London in the volume of its tonnage. Something like 50% of Hamburg was destroyed by bombing during the

second World War, but today Hamburg boasts of being the most rebuilt city in Germany.

This does not mean that the ugly scars of war are not evident on every hand. My lasting impression of Hamburg will always remain that of a giant pile of stone, rubble and twisted girders filling a whole city block area adjoining the ruins of the central railroad station.

I shall never forget that initial baptism of desolation. I had spent the entire day wandering from one bombed out section to another, and about six o'clock in the evening I suddenly realized I had completely forgotten to eat lunch. Dragging my weary bones into a cab, I asked the driver to take me to my hotel. As he drove away my troubled mind ventured the remark, "War is a ghastly business, isn't it?"

Turning toward me the driver, obviously a former soldier, replied, "Yes, war is a ghastly business, but it will come again—it must! And when it comes you in America will have too much materiel for Russia, just as you had too much for us. Russia has many men to squander and they are better soldiers than yours, but your intelligence and your equipment will win for you."

It was a bit shocking to hear another war taken so much for granted, and I was inclined to discount the point of view as that of an ex-soldier, still under

the hypnotic influence of his Nazi indoctrination.

The next day, however, I found myself talking with a city official of Hamburg, a sophisticated individual, wise in the ways of both Europe and the world. "America is a great country," he remarked, "and you have produced some very able leaders. Yet, I am convinced that few of those leaders understand European politics, much less the Russian mentality." Then his face grew grave as he continued, "You have made some serious blunders in your dealings with Russia, and now I very much fear we shall be called upon to pay in blood for those mistakes."

These conversations came back to me as I sat one day this summer eating lunch with a resident of Hamburg who was the director of a substantial business there. "Germany cannot go on indefinitely as a divided nation," he observed. "Our industrial west needs the food produced by the eastern half of our country. But so long as the Russians occupy the East there can be no real freedom of trade or communication. Russia must be forced to withdraw within her own borders, and if this is not accomplished within the next few years it will be too late. For then Eastern Germany, as well as all the satellite nations will be permanently communized."

The West German attitude toward the turmoil of these times is far from reassuring. Whenever the

occasion encouraged me to do so I would ask the question: "Was denkt man von dem Krieg?"—how do people feel about war? The answers came back in a great variety of words, but usually they seemed to mean the same thing—"We hope war may not come, but we fear it will!"

Berlin ist Kaputt

I was not in Berlin in 1951; I was there a year ago, however, and by recent visitors to that city I am led to feel Berlin has not changed greatly over the past twelve months. But my stay in the former capital of the German Empire during the summer of 1950 will always remain as the most sobering experience of my life.

At the height of its beauty, Berlin was one of the most stately cities of all the world with its lovely thoroughfares lined with architectural and cultural delights almost beyond number. But today, as those who still exist there put it, "Berlin ist kaputt"—Berlin is destroyed—it is gone—it is dead!

Scenes of destruction are always shocking—at least they are until you have lived with them so long that they become a normal and perhaps even congenial environment. Someone once told of the little Berlin boy who spent a vacation period in Switzerland. Upon his return his young friends eagerly queried him about the joys of his holidays. "Switzer-

land is all right," he replied, "but I did not have too much fun there. You see, there were no ruins to play in!"

The Berlin which met my eyes was a depressing scene. As the airport bus carried us to the outskirts of the city bleak, jagged walls, all that remained of the buildings which once stood there, rose before us. Entire streets of such destruction hurled themselves into our faces—brutally, nakedly and with sickening effect.

In Berlin I was quartered in a small frame hotel, formerly a sanitarium, in the Grunewald section of the city. I arrived just after noon and as soon as I was able to deposit my luggage in my room I went to the terrace for a bite of lunch. The head waiter, I learned, had worked for twenty years at the old Bristol Hotel in Unter den Linden. He was there when I visited Berlin in 1933. That seemed to establish a nostalgic comradeship.

"The Germans are not bitter over the war," he volunteered. "We do want a chance to work, however. You see we have 300,000 men unemployed in West Berlin and that is not good for a community of two million people."

"Germany must be helped to rebuild," he continued. "Then, too, if Russia is to be dealt with the Western powers must have more men under arms. Call them 'police' or what you wish, the

West must be prepared to defend itself."

Here I broke in, "Do you feel Russia will start a big war?" My head waiter friend thought a long time before answering. Then he spoke, measuring each word carefully as he uttered it, "It is not safe to believe she will not start a big war. If she does I think it will be soon. Within a year or two the West will be stronger. If she wants to start a big war Russia will strike before that. It is not safe to assume war will not come." He had completed the circle of his thinking, and I was scarcely more enlightened than I was before I had submitted my question.

The car I had ordered was now waiting at the door for me, so I folded my napkin, excused myself and joined Otto, my English speaking driver, for a first trip through the rubble and ruins that were once Berlin.

Otto had been in the German Army for eleven years. He had fought for three years against the Russians, had met the Americans in the Battle of the Bulge and had ended his army career in an American prison camp. "The Russians are brutal, fearless fighters," he told me, "but they are not too intelligent. They do not think for themselves. The Americans are not by nature good fighters, but they are intelligent and have the best equipment in the world. That makes them hard to beat."

Over the remains of Berlin horrible memories linger, like the ghosts of a tragic and misspent yesterday.

"When I came back from the war," said Otto, "I found my sister and her two children had been buried under the rubble of the building in which they lived. There are thousands of bodies under all this." He made a sweeping, panoramic gesture with his long arm. "Before the war all Berlin had some four million people. Now it has about three." The others had "gone West"—figuratively and literally.

"The Workers' Paradise"

After I had demonstrated to Otto that I would not prove a difficult charge he volunteered, one day, to take me into "the Workers' Paradise".

We entered the Russian sector near the ruins of the Reichs Chancellory, adjoining which are the remains of Hitler's death bunker where he and Eva Braun ended their lives. Now it is a huge pile of stone and pulverized concrete. "Do you suppose anyone ever found Hitler's body?" I asked. "No," replied Otto, "I'm sure he and Eva were never discovered—they must have been burned beyond all identification."

On we drove into Unter den Linden, passing the ruins of the Adlon Hotel and the site of the old

Bristol, now occupied by the beautiful new Russian Embassy building. Across the street stood the old University of Berlin, sufficiently restored to permit its operation under Russian auspices.

As we stood before the University buildings I thought of all the old German scholars who once had studied and taught within those walls, and these lines of Kipling began to thunder inside me:

"If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken

Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools . . ."

How much these words seemed to suit the circumstance!

Here and there, as we proceeded on our way, we passed buildings identified by the letters "H.O." They were the People's Stores, in which East Berliners bought what was made available to them. Before one food store stretched a double line a block long—citizens of the Workers' Paradise waiting with their cards to buy rationed food.

"The quality of food is bad," commented Otto, "and there is a great scarcity of it. The quality of everything in the Russian sector is poor, and things are very expensive."

We passed the old Opera House, the Monument to the Unknown Soldier, the Palace of Wilhelm II, and the Cathedral, all of which stood in black gaping ruins. Everywhere there were flags and bunting. Long red banners with yellow letters

screamed the legend "Freiheit, Einheit und Wohlstand"—Freedom, Unity and Well-being. These were the purposes of the Communist efforts—at least they were the advertised objectives.

Along the streets of East Berlin we saw boys, singly and in groups, dressed in the blue shirts of the Russian-sponsored Free German Youth Organization. "There you are," said Otto, "the only difference between them and the Hitler Youth is the color of their shirts. Get them young, tell them what you want them to believe and they will know no other way. It was like that under the Nazis."

Flags, banners, slogans, propaganda, youth organizations—these are the influences to which the Germans by nature and by temperament are strangely susceptible. It is all very well to say they are synthetic substitutes for the real needs of life—needs which, incidentally, are reasonably well supplied in West Berlin—but I'm fearful that the Western nations are underestimating the power of such pageantry. This danger is particularly significant as it relates to the young people, the citizens—and the soldiers—of a few years hence. The Russians, I'm disposed to feel, understand the German mind and temperament far better than do the Americans, and perhaps the British.

Otto Unburdens Himself

After our return from the Workers' Paradise I took Otto to lunch. I asked him to select the place,

specifying only that it be a restaurant where we could get a good hot meal. He took me to a cafe in Hardenbergstrasse. Otto had told me earlier that he could afford meat only on Sunday. When I ordered soup, steaks, vegetables and ice cream with strawberries Otto sat in silent amazement. But I had resolved that such a lunch should be my good deed for the day.

I wanted to know more about the background of this young fellow who had done so much for me that I could never have done for myself. Under the warming influence of a good meal Otto was disposed to talk and to reminisce. He had graduated from Technical University hoping to enter the automobile business. Then came the war—and the end to all his hopes.

"My father," said Otto, "owned a factory in Eastern Germany which made automobile accessories. But in 1945 the Russians took it."

"Even so," he continued, "when my father was young he had a future. My future is dark, and the future of my little boy . . ." Here Otto shrugged his shoulders in a gesture which signified the despair which was in his mind.

We finished our coffee more in thought than in words, for there was no easy answer to Otto's appraisal of the world in which he found himself.

The day I left Berlin Otto drove me to the air-

line office where we sat together awaiting the departure of the airport bus. Otto lighted a cigarette and turned as much toward me as the wheel of his car would permit. "I hope you have enjoyed your visit to Berlin," he began. Then with a sudden realization that the word 'enjoyed' was not quite appropriate in describing one's reactions to a scene so wanton as that which lay about us, he continued, "Berlin is . . .," here he searched for a word. "A tragedy," I interposed. "Yes, that is it. Berlin is a tragedy; all Germany is a tragedy to which there is no answer."

"We place great hope in America," he continued, "and we want to know more about your country. We'd like to have more of your good motion picture films. But please don't send us only your old ones. We don't want gangster pictures either for we've seen too much of gangsterism. Send us pictures that tell us about your culture, your cities, your factories, the way you live and the things you do. We want to see your mountains and your American Indians." When I told Otto that our Indians were a vanishing race his countenance fell. I felt like a man who had just told a child there was no Santa Claus.

I found it hard to realize that this man, with whom I had spent four unforgettable days, was a former German soldier, a man who had fought under

the Nazi banner in Russia and on the Western Front against my own country; who had gone through eleven years of military life under Hitler, and who had returned to an all but futureless career in the ruins of Berlin. Somehow it seemed to me he might be speaking more intelligently for his people than all the striped pants diplomats of the realm.

As Drew Middleton said recently in the New York Times, Hans Schmidt in West Germany's Dusseldorf and Hans Schmidt in East German Leipzig both have one crowning desire. It is to see their country reunited. Although they have a haunting fear of this very tragedy, they don't wish their nation to become the battlefield of World War III, nor do they wish to be maneuvered into an East-West Civil conflict. For these reasons they view the hazards of rearmament with no small measure of misgiving. It would be my judgment that this apprehension is decreasing in direct proportion to the growing strength of the West.

Now despite the fact that I have treated an immense subject in an extremely limited fashion, we must fly along to England, a second vital area on the map of freedom.

Britain—After Two Wars

Two great struggles have left disastrous marks on Britain. London bears her wounds of war—and

they are vast and deep—with dignity and pride. But these sterling attributes of British character are inadequate to cope with all the trials that have descended upon the Empire over the past generation.

Once the dominant power of Europe and the world, two wars have sorely bled Great Britain, and have brought her close to the point of exhaustion. She has never been self-sustaining, but has had to buy food and raw materials with the income from her exports and her investments.

The wars which began in 1914 and 1939 have destroyed Britain's reserves, impaired her capacity to export, forced the liquidation of her foreign investments, and in addition have witnessed, in substantial measure, the dissolution of her Empire. Whatever may have been the factors and the forces contributing to the present political and economic estate of Great Britain, it is sufficient to observe that today she finds it difficult to share burdens beyond those which so heavily tax her own resources.

Against such a background, let us look into the minds of the British people. How do they feel about their programs of nationalization? What is their attitude toward rearmament? What of the Welfare State? And what does the future hold? These are the questions to which I sought answers. I sought them everywhere—from Westminster Abbey to the East End of London and from London to Edinburgh

and Glasgow. The answers came from bankers and business men; educators, doctors and clergymen; clerks, waiters, barbers and taxidrivers—and from scores upon scores of others who represent the great cross section of British life. What was in their minds?

Had I gone to England this summer expecting to hear nationalization widely criticized I should have been in for a major surprise. As a banker friend put it, "Even though the Tories had been in power, they would undoubtedly have been forced to nationalize coal and transportation as both of these industries had become so burdened with problems that public operation seemed the only way out. Nationalization of the Bank of England," he continued, "has had little or no effect on the banking processes of Great Britain. They have gone on much as they did before the government took over."

The sentiment regarding public ownership of the steel industry is divided, and there are many who contemplate with genuine alarm the proposed nationalization of Insurance. "Such a development," said a London business leader, "might result disastrously for us. Insurance is one of our major sources of income from abroad, and we could scarcely expect your American firms, for example, to place their insurance with our government-owned companies, if by doing so they were put in the position

of underwriting our Socialist experiment."

Whatever may be the future trend of Nationalization, on this point all Englishmen are agreed—a sizeable omelet has already been whipped up, and in all Britain there are no political or economic miracle men capable of unscrambling it.

From a Driver's Seat

One day I engaged a cab driver to escort me through the ruined areas that comprise much of the Old Town of London, that mile square section of which St. Paul's is the center. I had chosen my driver carefully, because my interest included a great deal more than jagged walls and yawning basements. It has been my experience that cab drivers are among the best informed men a traveller encounters—and frequently the most discerning. My driver, whose name happened to be Ward, had been a member of the Royal Air Force during the recent war, and he bore all the earmarks of that select company.

As I stood with Ward, meditating over the destruction visited upon London by the last war, my mind kept running beyond the scene about us. "How do the English feel about rearmament?" I finally inquired. "There are great numbers of English people," Ward replied, "who view rearmament with serious questioning. As you know, we are now engaged in an extensive program of

rearmament, and there are many who feel that the cost of all this is money down the rathole. We are not wholly convinced that another war is inevitable, and all these military preparations serve to depress still more our lowered standard of living."

I am sure my companion had not overlooked the preventive aspect of rearmament, but like many other Englishmen with whom I talked he felt that financial and physical exhaustion were also sources of danger which dare not be disregarded.

"We in England are having a tough struggle," Ward continued. "We seem to have more people than we can support. There are those who say the answer to our problem lies in mass emigration to Canada, Australia and South Africa. So far the English people have not been too receptive to that idea. Maybe it's because they are paying for so many social benefits here in England that they want to stay and collect on them."

I seemed to recall that Benjamin Franklin once had something to say about security versus opportunity, but I kept my thoughts to myself. The problems of Britain are too vast and complex to be disposed of by epigrams.

What of the Future?

There is an immense amount of sober thinking going on in England today, and much of it represents

a definite break with tradition. One of my most stimulating discussions took place with a London marketing expert. Somehow it seemed that he might be an appropriate person to answer the query, "What does the future hold for England?" As I recall, I put my question in just about those words.

The reply was more comprehensive than I had anticipated. "By this time," my companion began, "you are familiar with many of the economic, social and political problems of Great Britain. I am sure I don't know the answers to them all, but somehow it seems to me that the future of England may lie in a union of nations—the Canadians, the Americans, the British, the Scandinavians, the Germans and all the other peoples who now inhabit Western Europe. This may not come in my lifetime, but in it I seem to see the ultimate answer to the problems of our common civilization."

"We are living in the showdown period of history," my host continued, "and it is only through the strength that comes from close cooperation that we of the West will be able to meet the challenge of these times. The mantle of leadership has now fallen on you in America, and we in England stand ready to play our full parts in helping you discharge the new responsibilities which are yours."

As I listened to these words I could not feel that the British sun had completely set. Their ex-

perience in world affairs, their dogged determination and the philosophy they have bequeathed self-governing peoples were imperishable. The British sense of destiny may have been seriously altered by circumstances, but it is still very much alive, and will remain as a force of great influence in the affairs of men.

Danger Makes Philosophers

I cannot leave the European scene without saying just a word about the Scandinavian countries. They are on a flank of the European front, and if war should come these nations would be difficult to defend. No one knows this better than the Scandinavians themselves.

But living in the face of danger seems to make philosophers of men. Nowhere in Europe, for example, have I encountered a greater degree of poise than that exhibited by the Norwegians. Occupied and desecrated by an invading army from 1940 to 1945 they know what war is, yet they refuse to give way to the hysteria of it. They seem to have made their peace with destiny. They will go on living; they will seek to strengthen themselves in every possible way, and if war should come they will face it with all the Viking fortitude at their command.

In many ways the Scandinavians view the problems of mankind with an enviable perspective. The

present tumult, as they see it, is but part of a great world readjustment, whose social implications are no less significant than its military aspects.

America's New Responsibility

I have covered a vast amount of ground, both physical and philosophical, within a very short time—too short, in fact, to permit a grasp of the full significance of all the experiences I have tried to bring to you. What do they all mean?

We are, in truth, in the showdown period of history. Our world which once included six or eight large powers, any combination of which might seek to hold others in check, has become an arena of decision in which two super-powers are struggling for world mastery. The first of these is the Soviet Union; the second is the United States of America.

In this crisis of civilization the stricken nations of Western Europe look hopefully to the United States. They recognize our vast physical resources; they pay high tribute to our ingenuity and our industrial might; they are almost bewildered by our undertakings and achievements. But with all their admiration of our strength, and perhaps out of their awareness of their dependence on it, the peoples of Europe are asking some penetrating questions about our weaknesses.

They have not put these questions as I now shall

try to do, but in sifting scores upon scores of conversations, with friends and acquaintances on the other side of the Atlantic, I find myself with a residue of three vital queries about this land of ours.

First, how mature are we?

In our lexicon are the words "biggest" and "best" always synonymous? Do we regard life as essentially a mad scramble for things, and is our chief measure of achievement to be found in the volume of physical embellishments with which we are able to surround our lives?

Is what is outside the individual more important to us than that which lies within his mind and heart—and even his soul? How would our philosophy of life affect the world entrusted to our leadership?

Second, have we learned self-discipline?

Are crime, corruption, waste and disregard for the laws of society as prevalent in America as our press would lead the world to believe? Surely we aren't giving a very happy account of ourselves in this respect. Lack of common honesty, profligate stewardship and indifference to the rights of others are serious indictments against a people to whom the free nations must look for help and guidance.

Third, in what do we place our trust?

There are those in other parts of the world who fear that we place too much reliance on physical power alone. Do we recognize that the intangible

attributes of men may be as decisive to the destiny of civilization as are the material forms of existence? Do we realize that through patient and persistent processes of diplomacy, education and understanding we may win the minds of men—and thus perhaps be spared the dreadful alternative of destroying their bodies?

These are not my questions. They are, I am led to feel, the deep seated concerns many thoughtful Europeans hold regarding America. We may not like them. We may feel they fail to give us credit for our real maturity, intelligence and basic unselfishness. But to fail to heed them would be a disaster for ourselves and for the world.

These questions probe the hidden depths of individual Americans. They are a search—a hopeful search I might add—for those qualities of heart and mind and spirit which make for the true greatness of a people.

The Spur of the Difficult

I have tried to bring you some of the thoughts of many people in other parts of the world. Perhaps in closing I may be forgiven if I inject my own considered judgment of the world scene.

I am convinced the nations in Europe and America which make up the Atlantic community will pretty well determine the future of civilization.

Whether or not we relish the idea, the United States has become the leader of these free nations and we must face up to that critical responsibility.

The way of the future will not be easy. There is an old Scottish saying that if a thing is hard it is good for you. We don't grow strong through ease and indulgences. With men and with nations, difficulty and even adversity bring out the best within us. I am convinced this will be true of America.

We are living in a world of fear, confusion—and hope. It is for us to add the qualities of confidence and courage. I know of no other way to accomplish this except through the things we do and the principles we stand for.

During my life I have had the privilege of association with a number of inspiring leaders. One of them was a pioneer of the business in which I spent some of the most fruitful years of my career. He had a guiding philosophy which was expressed in these lines:

“Isn't it strange that princes and kings
And clowns that caper in sawdust rings
And common folks like you and me
Are builders for eternity?

“To each is given a bag of tools
A shapeless mass and a book of rules;
And each must make, ere life has flown,
A stumbling block or a stepping stone.”

These verses hold a new and more impelling meaning for me today as I stand with you before this showdown period of history. And you who are engaged in foreign trade and those other pursuits which bear so directly and so forcefully on our practical relations with the peoples of other lands, are co-creators of world destiny. I have an abiding faith that you will acquit yourselves with distinction, as becomes those who are born to the heritage of freedom and true human progress.

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